# Ismahan_Levi Part 2

## Ismahan Levi Takes on the faithfreedom.com team

## Part IV

June 18, 2002

Dear Dr Sina,

As you are aware, I have exchanged emails with the person/s at ff.com over the last month or so, copies of which I forwarded to you for publication on your website.

I had two reasons for forwarding these to you. Firstly, mention was made of your website and your views on Islam. To this extent I believed you required to be made aware of my communication with the ff.com author/s. Secondly, I felt the issues raised by the ff.com author/s (hereinafter the author) and I should be accessible to viewers of both sites, not just the one. Therefore, whenever I received an email from the author I would respond to it and forward both communications to you.

After my email dated 30 May 2002 to the author, however, I received a terse reply informing me that their responses to the issues I raised could be found at their site. No reason was provided for this change of convention. This could be because the author does not wish her/his (hereinafter, for the sake of convenience, I will refer to the author using the male gender) arguments to be published on your website. To copy the author's arguments, respond to it and forward both documents to you for publication it would cause you difficulty with copyright laws. Hence, I will copy only those parts of the author's arguments which I wish to discuss and respond to those in the accepted convention. I acknowledge immediately that the arguments to which I respond here are the author's and all rights to it vest in and with him.

With this understanding, let us begin our discussion.

Visitors to the ff.com site will find the communications between the author and myself prefaced by an introduction which introduces me as "*an avowed Atheist*". It goes on to say that, "*as Muslims, we feel we can provide more of a challenge for Atheists than members of any other religion due to our concept of God as a single, intelligent force in nature which governs the whole of existence (as opposed to an old wrinkly grey-beard who resides on clouds, having relations with the odd virgin on Earth)*."

Yes, I am an atheist; but I also believe I am honest enough to accept that, should a valid argument be put forward to prove the existence of any god, leave alone the Islamic one, I

will change my beliefs to reflect that validity. Needless to state, I haven't come across any such argument. In short, I am not an avowed atheist but a person who uses her ability to reason as honestly as she can.

I can understand why the author heaps scorn and ridicule on the concept of the (implied) Christian god who allegedly had a relationship of some kind with a virgin. To attribute human qualities to an allegedly omniscient and omnipotent being limits that entity. Later, towards to the end of his reply, the author continues in the same vein, "*Muslims do like to reason, even more so than Christians who blissfully accept that this magnificent force in nature begets children*." I concur with this view of Christianity. It is the authors of the so-called synoptic gospels, Mark, Luke, Matthew and the author of the Fourth Gospel (allegedly John) who make the claim, based on rudimentary research and hearsay. Also, Mark's account was compiled at least fifty to sixty years after the events described in his account. Authors like Vermes ably demonstrate how virtually every aspect of Christianity was designed to supplant the dying religions of Mithras, Attis and the Osiris/Dionysus legend. Freke and Gandy in "The Pagan Jesus" (Thorsons, 1999) do so yet again in an easily digested manner.

Like the author, we may safely dismiss the idea of "*an old wrinkly grey-beard who resides on clouds*" and Michelangelo's conception in the Sistine Chapel, among other depictions, of the Christian deity.

This, however, leaves Muslims with a pressing question. If the Synoptic Gospels claim divinity for Jesus and we know this to be incorrect according to the Quran, how much of the four gospels can Muslims accept, if any? Yes, there are some historical facts which have been interwoven into the Jesus story, but is this to imply the entire story is true? After all, the best way to lie is to tell as much of the truth as possible. Is it not plausible that Paul, who most Muslims claim "invented" Christianity, might have used the events of the time to further his agenda? Is a complete conversion from Saul the tax collector to Paul, based on one single event (imagined or otherwise) on the road to Damascus, possible? Yes, indeed, but probable? Hardly likely. Furthermore, it is has been shown that Matthew and Luke based their accounts of the Jesus legend largely on Mark, with some differences in their accounts. May we not conclude, as Spong does, that the accounts contained in the four gospels are, to use a Jewish term, Midrash – folklore, legends, fables - which obtained over time?

Returning to the discussion regarding the Islamic concept of abrogation, the author states, "…*in order for me to explain the erroneous claims you have made I must resort to the old sources (the OT and NT) and extract for you the proofs which led to my original statement (that abrogation has been practiced by God for "eons")*."

This is an interesting aspect of the author's basis for disputation. In order to prove the validity of an Islamic concept, he claims as his basis a text upon which he has just heaped scorn. If the author can so readily dismiss the central claim, the main tenet, of the New Testament and ridicule it, how then is he able to turn to the selfsame text to prove his case? Does the author imply that he will use only those portions or claims of the New Testament which support his claims? Isn't this an example of double standards? The author may claim

that it is only some portions of the NT which have been falsified or edited. If this is the case, how does he and those Muslims who make similar claims know which parts of the NT have been falsified and which not? Is it those tenets which coincide with Islamic parallels that are considered truthful? In other words, do we base the case for abrogation in the Quran on those parts of the NT which the Quran says is true? Doesn't this constitute circular reasoning yet again? Furthermore, if the NT was edited (as Muslims claim), couldn't the Old Testament also have been subjected to the same process? How then do we base any argument upon either portion of the Bible?

The author goes on to quote Matthew who reports Jesus as saying, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them*." If we are to believe the Bible (specifically Matthew in this instance) we find Jesus stating that he has come to fulfil the laws of the OT and not abrogate them. But then the author exclaims, "*And surprising, Jesus, the omniscient Yahweh incarnate (allegedly!) suddenly had to change the Laws of Divorce, Justice and Oaths apart from changing his own mind!*" The author highlights just one of the many discrepancies contained within the NT. By the author's own implication, this underlines the fact that the NT text was created or edited with an agenda - to prove Jesus' divinity. We may, therefore, deny that attribute. Going further, consider the episode with the fig tree. Why should we believe such an inconsiderate, ill-tempered person may even be termed a prophet, leave alone a deity? But if he isn't a prophet, where does that leave Islam and its statements regarding him? Does the author accept or deny the validity of the episode and if yes, claim it to be an example of the editing process? If so, what proof does he furnish of this? It again begs the question, why set any store upon the Old or New Testaments?

The author quotes Matthew eight times and Deuteronomy thrice to prove the validity of abrogation. This merely underlines the reliance of the Quranic argument upon what is, by the author's implication, an edited text. Can, I ask again, such a source constitute a solid basis for argument? Is it possible we are shifting the goal posts? Again, the author makes the claim that the one deity authored the Torah, Bible and the Quran. This is hypothesis, a matter of belief and does not constitute proof of any kind. It is only the Quran and Muslims who make the claim, not Jews or Christians. Moreover, as most Muslims will tell you (and the author implies), the Torah and Bible were edited by man. This leaves the author with another issue to ponder: where is the unedited Bible upon which we may base the Quranic argument for abrogation?

To make my case that abrogation remains unique to Islam, I quoted from Arthur Jeffery. The author immediately claims, "*Arthur Jeffery is an Orientalist of Islam who either subscribes to the Christian faith (or once did). Muslim academics do not regard him to the extent you may think*."

Jeffery, Wansbrough, Rippin, Humphreys, et al are classed as Orientalists - independent scholars of Islam. Their works and findings may be not be construed as worthwhile by "Muslim academics", but is that surprising? Doesn't the term "Muslim academics" imply scholars who have an agenda or, at the very least, a predisposition toward Islam? Can they

not, therefore, be classified as apologists in the manner of Augustine who put forth his lengthy arguments for the Christian deity? Would you rather study an independent examination of a subject or one which has a closely allied agenda? The Muslim in turn asks, would you go to a Christian to study Hinduism? The analogy does not hold water. I would approach an authority who has no agenda or predisposition towards a subject, not one whose views might be biased, to gain an insight into the subject. So I ask, by the same token, would a Muslim approach a Christian bishop to study Christianity? (Soroush is one of the very few Islamic scholars who goes directly to the root sources for his research and is the exception to the rule.) These so-called Orientalists do not have an agenda to pursue; they present their findings as they understand them to obtain. They do not begin a study with any preconceptions. I, for one, would much rather study their observations and findings than those of the "Muslim academics" to whom the author refers. Interestingly, Rippin, Wansbrough and Humphreys independently reach closely allied findings: that the Quran was compiled over more than a hundred years by several persons. I look forward to Gerd Puin's book regarding the Sanaa copies of the Quran, details of which may be found at http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/99jan/koran.htm. As Puin states, the Quran has a history and evolved to its present form over time. I daresay abrogation was one the mechanisms used in that process.

The author next moves to my understanding of his use of the term "eons". He states he "*didn't expect you to give the above phrase the literal treatment so please accept that I used the word in a very loose manner*." I accept this explanation fully as a misunderstanding on my part. But the author then goes on to state "*everything that has evolved was created (even if evolution was the process of creating), the time difference between the two ends of our evolutional process obviously remains a matter of dispute*." This is yet another example of wishful thinking. The author seems to acknowledge that the single cause theory now rests on very shaky ground and so uses what is fast becoming de rigueur in the creationist camp by way of argument i.e. evolution is part of the creation process. A cursory study of the argument and the detail provided in the OT and the Quran in regard to the creation of Adam and Eve puts that argument to rest.

"*Muslims believe that the Quran is the last in a series of revelations from the One True God, one of a trilogy but the last. It therefore stands to reason that the author of the Quran (who is also the author of the Gospel and the Torah, according to Muslim belief) can abrogate previous commandments via his last revelation. Your conclusion that this is circular reasoning comes from the view you possess that the Quran is not by the same author and that all 3 revelations are in fact by 3 different people or groups of people. One cannot impose these conditions upon external thought and then deduce it to be "circular reasoning"*."

The author returns to the abrogation issue with my comments regarding circular reasoning. He states that the author of the OT, NT and Quran remains the same entity. I find this hard to comprehend. If by the author's tacit admissions previously we understand the OT and NT to be edited texts, surely they cannot be, in their present form, the works of the author of the

Quran, which Muslims will proudly state is unedited. This leaves the argument put forward in a tenuous position. If the Quran is the third part of the trilogy, it stands to reason that it is based on the previous works of many hands, leaving the author to nominate the "unedited" Bible. Else, the author and other Muslims must admit that the Bible is unedited. We cannot have our cake and eat it. My question remains: where is the unedited Bible upon which we may base the Quranic argument for abrogation? Interestingly enough, until very recently, visitors to the author's website, would find a link to http://www.answering-christianity.com/scholars_refute.htm wherein a Muslim apologist denounced the New Testament and states, "In the language of the idiot, THE NT IS A CORRUPTED UN-RELIABLE UN-AUTHENTIC PIECE OF SCRIPTURE. Really, it couldn't be put clearer than that."

"*Firstly **if** it can be proven that this is exactly what Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi, the author of an-Nasikh wal-Mansuk implied then I do not fully agree with nor do I subscribe to the opinion of 'Abd ar-Rahman Ibn Zayd Ibn 'Aslam and Dr. Sobhy. … For your information none of my local Imams agrees with those views (and some even assert that's not what they implied) as do not worldly recognised scholars like Shabir Alley, Hamza Yusuf, Jamal Al-Badawi and Ahmed Deedhat*."

This is another interesting aspect of the author's argument. When I pointed out in my previous email to the author that Islamic scholars pronounced 2:256 abrogated by 9:5, the author stated he does not subscribe to this view. It must be asked, why is this so? To state this claim isn't true because it doesn't coincide with the author's own views or those of the Imams he has spoken to in this matter is not acceptable. A reason must be provided. Moreover to cast doubt as to whether al-Andalusi did actually make the claim diminishes the author's argument. I refer the author as I did before to his book, " An-Nasikh wal- Mansukh, Dar al-Kotob al-'Elmeyah".

I must confess I did not recognise the "worldly recognised scholars" the author referred to, so I did a search for their works on the World Wide Web, this being the most easily accessible resource. Surprisingly, I found them to be, by and large, individuals who primarily dispute Christianity with its apologists and do not say anything that Bukhari, Muslim, Ibn Hisham, Ibn Kathir, Tabari, or the Jurisprudents as-Shafi'i, Abu Hanifa, Ibn Anas and Ibn Hanbal did centuries ago. Moreover, I came across an interesting site which may place the views of Mr Deedhat in perspective. It is maintained by Christians but echoes the Muslim Digest of South Africa from where, I understand, Mr Deedhat originates. The site http://answering-islam.org/Responses/Deedat/deedat.html makes interesting reading. Refutations to the arguments of the other persons the author names as "worldly recognised scholars" may also be found there, bearing in mind these are provided by Christians with a different agenda.

*"…it's a well established fact that there are void verses in the Quran, why do you sound so surprised? By keeping the abrogated verses preserved in the Quran, we are informed of the fact that God implemented His Shariah (not punishment) in its final shape with extreme wisdom and mercy."*

The author poses yet another conundrum for himself with this view. We are told, time and again, that the Quran is the perfect book which has always existed as the Islamic god's word/law. To claim that the void verses (to use the author's term) are retained within it to demonstrate the "final shape" of the deity's law implies a historicity, an editing process of the book by the deity or others in order to get things right, or the non-omniscience of the deity. Alternatively, if this is not the case, we must acknowledge that the Quran as it exists today is not the "exact copy" of the perfect book in heaven. Which ever way it is examined, this argument poses considerable problems for those who use it.

"*With Atheists, it seems when a particular argument, even though the brains behind it is a Christian, is at hand which corresponds to their views they without hesitation adopt it but at all other times Christians as well as Muslims are mentally defect. Is this the way to comprehend truth?*"

Permit me to offer a simple explanation. Atheists, by and large, use logic to explain their belief system or lack thereof. They seek truth and employ the device of reason to reach a conclusion. If the reasoning or logical process was first enunciated by a theist, in general, or a Christian / Muslim in particular, it remains of no consequence to the atheist. It is the logic of the argument which is examined, not the person who provides the argument. For this reason, I am able to concur with the author's views on Christianity. Does this imply I should not use the Muslim arguments if I find them to be logical, well presented and factual? I do not question, as I have said previously, the right of the individual to worship as he or she sees fit but the logic of the primary belief, in this case Islam. Furthermore, when that belief system takes for itself the cladding of science to "prove" its wisdom, I examine closely those tenets which are claimed to be scientific. In the case of Islam, they fail woefully. The Muslim apologist has yet to make a case for Islam. Muslims readily point to perceived deficiencies in the Bible and Torah but hesitate to apply the same rules of examination to the Quran. It may be timely to quote the Book of Proverbs, "See first the log in your eye before you find the speck in another's".

Elsewhere in his response, the author accuses me of "complete ignorance" of the religions discussed. This may very well be true. At no time have I claimed authority to speak on the subject of religion. I am a logician by profession, not a theologian. I merely raise issues which, to my mind, stand out as having little, if any, relevance to logical processes. Would it be too much to ask the author to provide a statement as to the authority he brings to the subject? May we ask why the author relies so much on a scripture which a fellow Muslim denounces as "A CORRUPTED UN-RELIABLE UN-AUTHENTIC PIECE OF SCRIPTURE."? If this is correct, if the author agrees with this finding, why does he quote this piece of "corruption" to make his case for abrogation?

Finally, permit me to end with another quote, this time by Stephen Roberts: "I contend that we are both atheists. I just believe in one fewer god than you do. When you understand why you dismiss all the other possible gods, you will understand why I dismiss yours." (http://freethought.freeservers.com)

It is difficult, given the constraints of time and personal issues, to answer completely (and with the range of arguments, references, websites, and other resources available) the author’s claims and assertions. I trust, however, this goes some small way towards doing so. Please feel free to publish this response on your website if you see fit.

Regards,

Ismahan Levi